

## PALAEARCTIC MIGRANTS IN THE MIDDLE AND LOWER JUBBA VALLEY, SOUTHERN SOMALIA

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During 1987 I spent two short periods studying the abundance of Palaearctic migrants in the Jubba valley, southern Somalia. From 18 to 28 March observations were made along the river and its floodplain and in the peripheral bushlands, from Kismaayo on the coast upstream to Bu'aale (see Fig. 1). This was towards the end of a particularly severe and protracted dry season. Most migrants found then were assumed to be wintering, and there was little indication of early spring passage. On a further visit during the 'short' rainy season, from 5 to 12 November, observations were confined to the area between Kismaayo and Fanoole barrage, 40 km north of Jilib. This second visit provided an opportunity to assess the southward migration of Palaearctic landbirds through the area, and also to assess its importance for migrant waders at a time when natural wetlands and irrigation schemes were still extensively flooded.

Much of the lower Jubba floodplain, from the neighbourhood of Jamaame to above Jilib, is under cultivation, the main crops being maize and bananas. The Fanoole and Mogambo irrigated rice projects, some 10–20 km north of Jamaame and east and west of the river respectively, each covers tens of thousands of hectares. Equally extensive is the Jubba sugar project, centred further upstream at Mareerey, west of the river. In this area, regular wet season flooding associated with high river levels during May–August leave extensive temporary floods (*dhesheegs*) and numerous small pans which may persist up to November–December. There are scattered small patches of bush and thicket, much of it *Acacia nilotica*. Nearer the coast, the valley is less agriculturally productive, mostly dry plains and bushland and sandy ridges covered with low *Acacia tortilis* woodland. Here, the largest of the *dhesheegs*, Lake Waamo, is situated in dry bush country some 30 km west of Jamaame. This huge depression, about 20 km from west to east by about 5 km wide, has connections with the Kenyan Northern Ewaso Nyiro system.

Along the middle Jubba, upstream of Jilib, the floodplain is more thickly bushed, and agriculture more patchy. North of Fanoole barrage (which supplies water via a canal to the Fanoole rice project some 60 km to the south) and almost to Bu'aale, the bush is very thick and deeply flooded areas exist, some of which persist through the dry season. Along this stretch, the last patches of riverine forest survive, although these are disappearing fast. From Bu'aale northwards the floodplain is much narrower, with *Acacia-Dobera* bushland reaching to within a few hundred metres of the river.

## OBSERVATIONS

During the March visit, most of the floodplain vegetation and the peripheral bushlands were dry and leafless. Some green thicket and rank grass cover persisted near the river, however, especially around and above Fanoole barrage. Two large, muddy-edged *dhesheegs* with over 100 ha of standing water were found—Lake Radiile near Bu'aale and Shoonto *dhesheeg* some 20 km to the south—in an area bounded by riverine forest on one side and thicket and woodland on the other. Shoonto in particular held impressive numbers of waders, ducks, herons and storks. Further south, near Jamaame, a few scat-

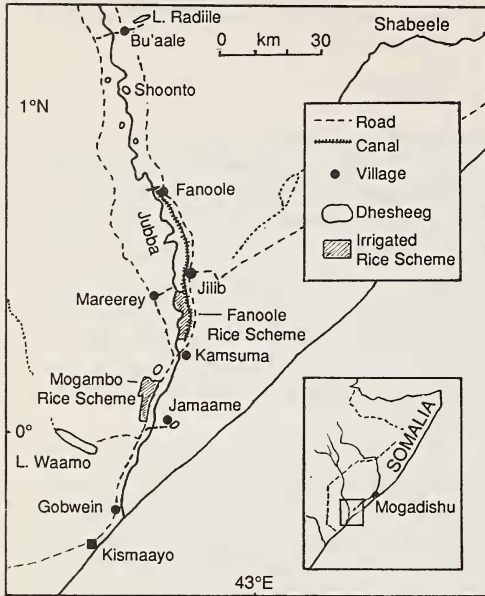


Fig. 1. Showing middle and lower Jubba valley, Somalia and localities mentioned in the text

tered thicket patches were still green but the *dhesheegs* were all dry.

Waterbirds were found mainly above Fanoole barrage. A few thousand migrant waders were estimated present in all, mainly Little Stints *Calidris minuta* and Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola*. These were concentrated at Shoonto and Lake Radiile, with smaller numbers on other wet patches, such as over-spills from canals and irrigation ditches. Further south, a small flooded section of Fanoole rice scheme held over 1000 Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax*. Very few waders were present along the exposed silty edges of the river; occasional Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos*, Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia*, Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and Little Stints.

Small groups of Garganey *Anas querquedula* were the only Palaeartic ducks found.

Only eight migrant landbird species appeared to be wintering in the valley in any numbers. Three of these occupied bush and thicket habitats. Rufous Bush Chat *Cercotrichas galactotes* and Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* were frequent in drier bush peripheral to the floodplain, especially where thicket was broken and less continuous. The former was the commoner of these two, and over ten could usually be located in a morning in the appropriate habitat. Both were more numerous in the sandy *Acacia tortilis* woodlands near the coast, but ranged north to at least Bu'aale. Small numbers of Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* were found in woodland thicket along the middle Jubba and in patches of bush around irrigation channels near Jamaame. Four other species were widespread and common in cultivated and open country: Pied Wheatears *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Isabelline Wheatears *O. isabellina* (mainly on dusty plains nearer the coast), Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* and Eurasian Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. Finally, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters *Merops persicus* were very common, especially perched on wires along irrigation canals.

In November, the short rains were in progress and much of the floodplain and nearby bushlands were becoming green. Also, this was the end of the river flood season so that there was an abundance of green *Acacia nilotica* thicket and rank undergrowth near the river suitable for migrants. Wet habitat for waders, ducks, herons and storks was now available in the lower part of the valley, and Lake Waamo was largely flooded. The rice

schemes were also extensively irrigated. Migrant waders and other water birds were far more abundant in this area than in March. Numbers of waders on the rice schemes were estimated very roughly at 3000 at Fanoole and 8000 at Mogambo. Several thousand more were scattered on drying *dhesheegs* and small pans around Jilib and Jamaame. At Lake Waamo, 200 waders were counted along a kilometre of fairly open grassy-muddy shore at a cattle watering point. These included no less than five Great Snipe *Gallinago media*. This huge expanse had a flooded perimeter of at least 30 km, but much of this was bordered by bushes and vegetation and so held limited numbers of waders. Herons were present in many thousands, however, (250 Squacco Herons *Ardeola ralloides* were counted perched on bush tops in one area of less than 5 ha), and storks, ibises and White-faced Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna viduata* were also very numerous. A conservative total of 20 000 waders, half of them on natural floods, was estimated present in November in the lower part of the valley. By contrast, the wetlands along the middle Jubba north of Fanoole barrage appeared to be deep and less suitable for waders than in the dry season.

The variety of migrant landbirds was greater than in March. Most were apparently on passage, and were seen in the thicket and woodland of the floodplain. Nightingales were widespread and abundant, and scores were present around Fanoole barrage alone. At some rank sites a few Sprossers *Luscinia luscinia* were also present. Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata* and Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* were quite common, and a few Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus*, Eurasian Cuckoos *Cuculus canorus* and Eurasian Rollers *Coracias garrulus* were noted. Palaeartic warblers were scarce, however. Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* were limited to occasional ones and twos. Several Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria* were found near the coast and a single River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* was seen at Jilib. Pied and Isabelline Wheatears were common and practically up to winter numbers. A few Northern Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* were also present, presumably on passage. It was interesting that not a single Rufous Bush Chat and only one Upcher's Warbler was found on this second visit; the wintering populations of these two species had presumably not yet arrived. Grey Wagtails *Motacilla cinerea* were seen surprisingly often, usually in villages, and it was assumed that some of these at least were on passage. White Wagtails *M. alba* occurred increasingly throughout the November week. This is perhaps a common wintering bird (see Ash & Miskell 1983) whose absence in March was due to an early departure (it leaves Kenya before mid March).

Migrant birds of prey were remarkably uncommon and few species were recorded. Only eight individuals were seen during the whole November week, at a time when the heavy raptor passage through neighbouring Kenya is at a peak.

## DISCUSSION

Published information on the wintering and passage of Palaeartic migrants along and to the west of the Jubba in southern Somalia is very scanty. Recent new observations from the country, notably by J.S. Ash (see, e.g., Ash 1983, Ash & Miskell 1983, 1988), have come mostly from the Shabelle and Mogadishu areas. The records summarized here, therefore, add substantially to knowledge of migration in areas quite close to the Kenya border. According to the atlas data given by Ash & Miskell (1983), no fewer than eighteen

of the Palaeartic species recorded here were new to the Jubba valley (for details see Appendix 1). Three, Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Great Snipe and River Warbler, were new to the Somalia list. Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, though not listed by Ash & Miskell (1983), is now known from one recent sighting on the Shebelle (J.E. Miskell, pers. comm.).

The wetlands and irrigation schemes in the lower part of the valley clearly provide important habitat for migrant waders during the autumn passage period. Only a few thousands overwinter, however, and the main sites supporting birds through the dry season seem to be located further up-river, north of Fanoole barrage. In general, more waders were found than those known to utilize corresponding areas along the lower Tana River in Kenya (author's obs.). On the other hand, the variety of migrant landbirds wintering was much less than in eastern Kenya (see, e.g., Britton 1980, Lack *et al.* 1981, Pearson *et al.* 1988). In particular, Olivaceous Warblers *Hippolais pallida*, Red-tailed Shrikes *Lanius isabellinus*, Barred Warblers, Whitethroats *Sylvia communis*, Iranias *Irania gutturalis*, Rock Thrushes *Monticola saxatilis* and Eurasian Rollers were scarce or absent, and Spotted Flycatchers, so common in coastal Kenya, were rather few. Basra Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus griseldis*, common on the lower Tana (Pearson *et al.* 1978) and known in Somalia from one site on the Shabelle (Ash & Miskell 1985), were searched for in rank habitat along the Jubba, but were not found wintering. The two species widespread in the Jubba bushlands, Rufous Bush Chat and Upcher's Warbler, are also known to winter commonly in Kenya, from the middle and lower Tana, south through Galana and Tsavo and it is likely that both occur widely through Kenya-Somalia border areas.

A heavy migration of Palaeartic landbirds occurs during November and December through central and southeastern Kenya (see, e.g., Pearson & Backhurst 1976, Pearson *et al.* 1988), and has been extensively studied in Tsavo at Ngulia Lodge (e.g. Backhurst & Pearson 1984). It is likely that this movement originates mainly in central and western Ethiopia, for the three principal species involved, the Marsh Warbler, the Sprosser and the Whitethroat, have been little recorded in northeast Kenya. It was of interest therefore that, of these three, only a few Sprossers and an occasional Marsh Warbler were encountered along the Jubba. Of the species migrating through southeastern Kenya it would seem that only the Nightingale and a few Eurasian Rollers, Cuckoos, Red-backed Shrikes, Spotted Flycatchers and perhaps some wheatear species and Upcher's Warblers might arrive via southern Somalia. The abundance of the Nightingale along the Jubba was especially interesting. This species occurs on southward passage in Somalia as far east as Mogadishu, though in smaller numbers (R.E. Stjernstedt, pers. comm.). These birds, and the concentrations noted in November along the middle and lower Tana in Kenya (author's obs.) would suggest a major stopover area for the Nightingale in eastern Ethiopia.

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#### APPENDIX 1

Palaeartic migrants recorded from the middle and lower Jubba valley 18–28 March and 5–12 November 1987. Species previously unrecorded from the Jubba valley according to Ash & Miskell (1983) are indicated by an asterisk.

\*Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* 1 Fanoole rice scheme 5 Nov. Only the second record for Somalia.

\*Shoveler *Anas clypeata* 2 Jamaame 9 Nov.

Garganey *A. querquedula* small parties in March on *dhesheegs*, dams and irrigation from Mareerey north to Lake Radiile; max. c. 80 Radiile. Small parties Nov Jamaame and Lake Waamo.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus*, Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* occasional singles of all three harrier species, both seasons, from Jamaame area north to Shoonto.

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* 2 Fanoole barrage 20 Mar; 1 Jamaame 11 Nov.

\*Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* 1 in trees along river at Jilib 6 Nov. No previous record for Somalia.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* 1 Jamaame 9 Nov.

\*Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni* 1 Fanoole barrage 6 Nov was the only record.

\*Hobby *Falco subbuteo* 1 Kamsuma 7 Nov was the only record.

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* recorded Mareerey and Fanoole barrage in March, with a flock of c. 400 Lake Radiile 22 Mar; a small party Kismaayo 11 Nov.

Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius* occasional in March, with ones and twos along silty river edges. In November, small parties up to 20 common on muddy pans and edges of *dhesheegs*.

Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula* in March common along river with c. 200 Fanoole barrage; common other wetlands with 100+ Shoonto *desheeg*. Common in November on floods and rice schemes with hundreds at Mogambo.

\*Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* 10+ Shoonto *dhesheeg* 21 Mar and c. 10 Lake Radiile 22 Mar.

Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola* very abundant and widespread both seasons on wetlands and irrigation; the most numerous wader on rice schemes and natural floods. Thousands in November at Fanoole and Mogambo rice schemes and at Lake Waamo.

Greenshank *T. nebularia* widespread in small numbers both seasons. Singles along the river in March.

Green Sandpiper *T. ochropus* singles Mareerey in March; 1 Jilib and several Mogambo rice scheme in November.

Marsh Sandpiper *T. stagnatilis* Common and widespread on wetlands and irrigation; max. in March c. 100 Lake Radiile; in November hundreds at Mogambo rice scheme.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* 2 Jamaame 9 Nov and 2 Jilib 11 Nov, on small pans.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* very common and widespread in small numbers both seasons. In ones and twos along the river in March.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* uncommon in March. Small numbers in November around Jamaame and on the rice schemes, but scores present Lake Waamo.

\*Great Snipe *G. media* 5+ Lake Waamo 10 Nov along 1 km of shore. No previous record for Somalia.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* common both seasons in small parties on muddy pans and *dhesheegs*.

Little Stint *C. minuta* widespread and abundant on muddy pans and *dhesheegs*. In March, max. c. 400 at Shoonto. Hundreds in November on rice irrigation and at Lake Waamo.

Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii* in March, up to 3 together along silty river edges Jilib and Bu'aale; also 6+ Shoonto *dhesheeg* and 3 Lake Radiile. In November, 2 Jamaame on 9th, 2 Lake Waamo on 10th and 1 Jilib on 11th.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* scarce; 2 Fanoole rice scheme 27 Mar; 1 Lake Waamo 10 Nov.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* small numbers in March on wetlands Fanoole barrage—Bu'aale and 1000+ Fanoole rice scheme. In November, widespread and abundant in lower part of valley with thousands Mogambo and 1000+ Lake Waamo.

\*Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* a few non-breeding plumaged birds Mareerey factory dams 19 Mar and Fanoole barrage 20 Mar. Two non-breeding plumaged birds

Jamaame 9 Nov. Very possibly Palaeartic in origin.

**White-winged Black Tern** *C. leucopterus* small numbers March, Mareerey–Bu'aale, max. 70+ Shoonto; a few hundreds in November Fanoole and Mogambo rice schemes.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* local and in small numbers; a few Fanoole and Shoonto in March and Jamaame area in November.

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* near coast seen upstream to Gobwein.

**\*Eurasian Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* frequent in November; ones and twos seen Jilib, Mogambo, Kamsuma and Gobwein.

**Eurasian Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* 2 together on wires along Jilib–Fanoole barrage road, 6 Nov.

**Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *M. persicus* common both seasons in open country on the floodplain, especially on wires along canals. Scores along Jilib–Fanoole barrage road in November, with parties constantly moving south.

**Eurasian Roller** *Coracias garrulus* in March 1 Mogambo on 24th was the only record. In November, uncommon; up to three together around Jilib.

**Eurasian Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* common and widespread on floodplain. Scores and hundreds in November, but small numbers in March.

**Eurasian Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* 1 Jilib March was the only record.

**Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* in March, 1 flying north Fanoole barrage on 20th and 2 in bush near Bu'aale on 21st. In November, 1 along river at Jilib on 5th and 3 on 6th; 2 in *Acacia* woodland Gobwein on 11th.

**Rufous Bush Chat** *Cercotrichas galactotes* widespread and common in March in dry bush and thicket peripheral to floodplain, where it was the most numerous passerine migrant; especially common on red soil near coast; occasionally seen on floodplain but not noted near the river. None seen in November.

**Sprosser** *Luscinia luscinia* a few in November (5th, 6th and 12th) in thicket near the river at Jilib; also 30+ around Fanoole barrage on 7th and one near Jamaame on 9th. Some of these birds were in song.

**Nightingale** *L. megarhynchos* in March, a few in residual green scrub patches at Kamsuma, single birds by river at Jilib and Fanoole barrage and 20+ in woodland edge thicket at Shoonto. In November, very common on the floodplain from Jamaame area northwards, especially in *Acacia nilotica* thickets, with smaller numbers in peripheral bushland also; scores around Fanoole barrage; many in song.

**Eurasian Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* scarce; 1 Mareerey 24 Mar; 1 Jilib 7 Nov.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* very common in March and November on flat dusty plains around Jilib and nearer the coast; occasional further north.

**Northern Wheatear** *O. oenanthe* 1 at Jilib on 28th, probably on passage, was the only March record. Frequent and widespread in November, mainly on floodplain cultivation.

**Pied Wheatear** *O. pleschanka* common and widespread in open bush and cultivation, on floodplain and peripheral areas; from Lake Waamo and Jamaame northwards, but none

seen on coast. More numerous in March than November.

\***Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis* 1 along ditch on Mogambo rice scheme 7 Nov was the only record.

\***Marsh Warbler** *A. palustris* in November, 2 Jilib on 5th, 2 Fanoole on 7th, 2-3 after rain Mogambo rice scheme on 7th, 1 Jamaame on 8th, 1 Kamsuma on 9th; generally scarce.

\***Sedge Warbler** *A. scheoeno* singing Mareerey factory dams 24 Mar; also seen Fanoole rice scheme 27 Mar.

\***Upcher's Warbler** *Hippolais languida* in March, the commonest migrant warbler; widespread throughout dry bush and *Acacia tortilis* woodland outside the floodplain; commonest near coast where many in song in red soil woodland thicket. In November, 1 Gobwein on 11th was the only record.

\***Olivaceous Warbler** *H. pallida* uncommon. In March, single birds singing and presumably wintering in floodplain thicket near Jilib and Jamaame. In November, 1 Fanoole barrage, 1 Jamaame and 1 Kamsuma, again all on floodplain.

\***River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* 1 in *Acacia nilotica* thicket and rank grass by river at Jilib 12 Nov. Good views obtained. No previous record for Somalia.

\***Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* a presumed passage bird Fanoole barrage 21 Mar.

**Barred Warbler** *S. nisoria* at least 10 in *Salvadora persica* thicket in *Acacia tortilis* woodland at Gobwein 11 Nov; probably many more since only a small part of the habitat was covered.

\***Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* 2 in scrub along river bank at Fanoole barrage, together with a Whitethroat, on 21 Mar were presumably on passage. No other records.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* very few in March, in riverine thicket and *Acacia* woodland; some of these were completing moult and presumably wintering. Common and widespread in November south to the coast, mostly on the floodplain.

\***Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* scarce; 1 Shoonto 22 Mar, 2 Lake Waamo 10 Nov and 2 Jilib 11 Nov.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* 1 Jilib on 19th was the only March record. Increasingly common during the November week in villages and near coast.

**Grey Wagtail** *M. cinerea* frequent in November in villages, usually by water; mostly singly, but 4 together Jamaame on 8th.

**Yellow Wagtail** *M. flava* common both seasons on floodplain near water and with domestic stock; hundreds Lake Waamo in November. Birds racially assigned were mostly *flava* and *beema*.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* frequent and widespread in November, in ones and twos on the floodplain.

**Red-tailed Shrike** *L. isabellinus* a male of the race *speculigerus* at Jilib 19 Mar was the only record.